

## 4

### **The Exit RP Test**

Many end of life options are discussed in this book and it can be a daunting project trying to distinguish or compare the relative advantages or shortcomings of one over the other. To simplify the process, we have developed a simple rating system that can be applied to all end of life methods. We call this the Reliability & Peacefulness Test – the ‘Exit RP Test’.

#### **Primary Criteria**

The ‘Exit RP Test’ provides a benchmark against which all end of life options can be considered. The values addressed by the test came to Exit’s attention through specific research on the notion of a Peaceful Pill and also through personal accounts and anecdotes over the past decade. This feedback continues to identify two principal factors in people’s preferences for end of life methods. These factors are ‘Reliability’ and ‘Peacefulness.’

In the RP Test, Reliability and Peacefulness are each given a score of 1 to 10. The higher the number, the more reliable and peaceful the method in question. For example, Nembutal achieves a high overall score, hanging a very low score.

## **Reliability (R - 10)**

Reliability has been consistently identified as a major important factor in assessing end of life methods. A seriously ill person wanting to end their life needs to know the method *will* work. No one wants to take chances with a method that *might* work. Reliability is essential.

## **Peacefulness (P - 10)**

Peacefulness is the second major criteria identified by Exit. There is almost no interest in methods that are violent, irrespective of how reliable they might be.

The most commonly expressed wish by seriously ill and elderly people is that they be able to die in their sleep.

## **Secondary Criteria**

There are a number of lesser, but nevertheless highly-desired, characteristics for a method of dying. Six additional secondary factors are listed below:

Availability (A)  
Preparation and Administration (Pr)  
Undetectability (U)  
Speed of Effect (Sp)  
Safety to Others (Sa)  
Storage - Shelf Life (St)

In the RP test, a score of 1-5 is given for each of these secondary characteristics.

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### **Availability (A - 5)**

To be of any use the method must be available. The most peaceful and reliable drug is of no use if it is unavailable.

### **Preparation and Administration (Pr - 5)**

Simplicity of preparation and administration is an important factor. No one wants to use complicated equipment that is difficult to assemble or drugs that are hard to use.

### **Undetectability (U - 5)**

Methods that leave no obvious trace are strongly preferred. In reality, this might mean that an attending physician will be more likely to assume that the death has been caused by a known underlying disease. In this situation, the question of suicide does not arise.

### **Speed of Effect (Sp - 5)**

Speed of death is a further significant factor. Speed limits the likelihood of discovery and any possible interference (resuscitation).

### **Safety to Others (Sa - 5)**

Most seriously ill people do not want to die alone. Methods that present a danger to others are unpopular for this reason.

### **Storage - Shelf life (St - 5)**

There is a strong preference for methods that use substances, drugs or items that do not deteriorate with time. This means the person should be able to assemble the required items or obtain

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the required drugs in advance, and not have to worry about linking the possible timing of one's passing to the acquisition of the items. All of the methods described in this book have been given an Exit RP Test score. The maximum possible is 50 points, the higher the score the 'better' the method. Some criteria will vary of course depending on an individual's particular circumstances. *The RP Test rating should only ever be used as a general guide.*

Take the example of the Exit Bag when used in conjunction with Helium (see Chapter 5).

<b>Test Factor</b>	<b>Score</b>
Reliability: This is good, but technique is important	R=8/10
Peacefulness: There is some short term awareness and alarm	P=7/10
Availability: Necessary items are readily available	A=5/5
Preparation: Items require assembly and coordination	Pr=1/5
Undetectability: If items removed, totally undetectable, even in the event of an autopsy	U=5/5
Speed: Unconsciousness and death occur quickly	Sp=5/5
Safety: The method presents no risk to others present	Sa=5/5

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Storage:

Equipment does not deteriorate and testing readily available

St=5/5 is

**Total for Helium and an Exit Bag**

**41 (82%)**

Now compare the RP Test result for the Exit Bag + Helium with the Use of Sodium Cyanide (see Chapter 7).

**Test Factor**

**Score**

Reliability: This is very high

R=10/10

Peacefulness: Patchy reports, hard to assess

P=5/10

Availability: Difficult to obtain or manufacture

A=2/5

Preparation: This is straightforward

Pr=5/5

Undetectability: Some clinical changes may be noted, certainly noted on autopsy

U=3/5

Speed: Produces a rapid death

Sp=5/5

Safety: There may be some slight risk to those present from possible HCN gas production

Sa=3/5

Storage: Well packaged, shelf life indefinite

St=5/5

**Total for Sodium Cyanide**

**38 (76%)**

## **A Note of Caution**

The RP Test score serves only as a guide. Individual circumstances and preferences will always influence a person's decision. There are people for whom a plastic Exit bag over their head will never be a viable option, no matter how peaceful and reliable the method.

This may be because of an individual's particular aesthetic concern and have nothing to do with the method's high reliability physiologically. Nevertheless, *if* this is a real concern, the method will not be considered, irrespective of the high RP Test score.

Similarly, the 'availability' of a particular method can differ from individual to individual. The comparison above suggests that helium would be preferred above cyanide.

However, if an individual has recently become so disabled through illness that the use of an Exit Bag is physically impossible, and yet that same person has access to cyanide powder, the final choice will clearly not be determined by the highest RP Test score.

See the Table towards the end of the *eHandbook* which provides the overall RP Test scores for the six approaches described in this book.